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2020 Election: Secure Your Vote

FACT CHECK: Trump Spreads Unfounded Claims About Voting By Mail

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MILES PARKS



Clark County, Nev., election worker Stean Durias scans mail ballots at the Clark County Election Department this month.

Ethan Miller/Getty Images

President Trump has made it clear that he does not support allowing all registered voters access to mail ballots this fall, even during a pandemic. But he keeps changing his story about why he's opposed.

2020 ELECTION: SECURE YOUR VOTE

Why Is Voting By Mail (Suddenly) Controversial? Here's What You Need To Know

Jennifer Morrell, an elections consultant and former local elections official in Utah and Colorado, told NPR that for such a plot to work just for a single ballot, an adversary would need to mimic everything perfectly from the ballot's size, style and even the weight of the paper to the envelope it's mailed in — all of which often changes every election cycle and differs from county to county.

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"Ballots are built unique for each election. Each jurisdiction will normally have dozens to hundreds of unique ballot styles. Proofs for each ballot style are reviewed and tested to ensure the ballot scanners will read those ballots and only those ballots," Morrell said. "Even ballots created on that system from a previous election cannot be read."



Among his past claims, the president has said ballots would be stolen out of mailboxes, despite very little evidence of such fraud over the past 20 years. Trump has also said universal access to mail-in voting would boost Democrats and prevent Republicans from winning future elections, despite studies and real-life election results contradicting that theory.

On Monday, he changed his argument again, claiming without evidence that foreign countries would print and send in "MILLIONS OF MAIL-IN BALLOTS."

"IT WILL BE THE SCANDAL OF OUR TIMES!" he tweeted.



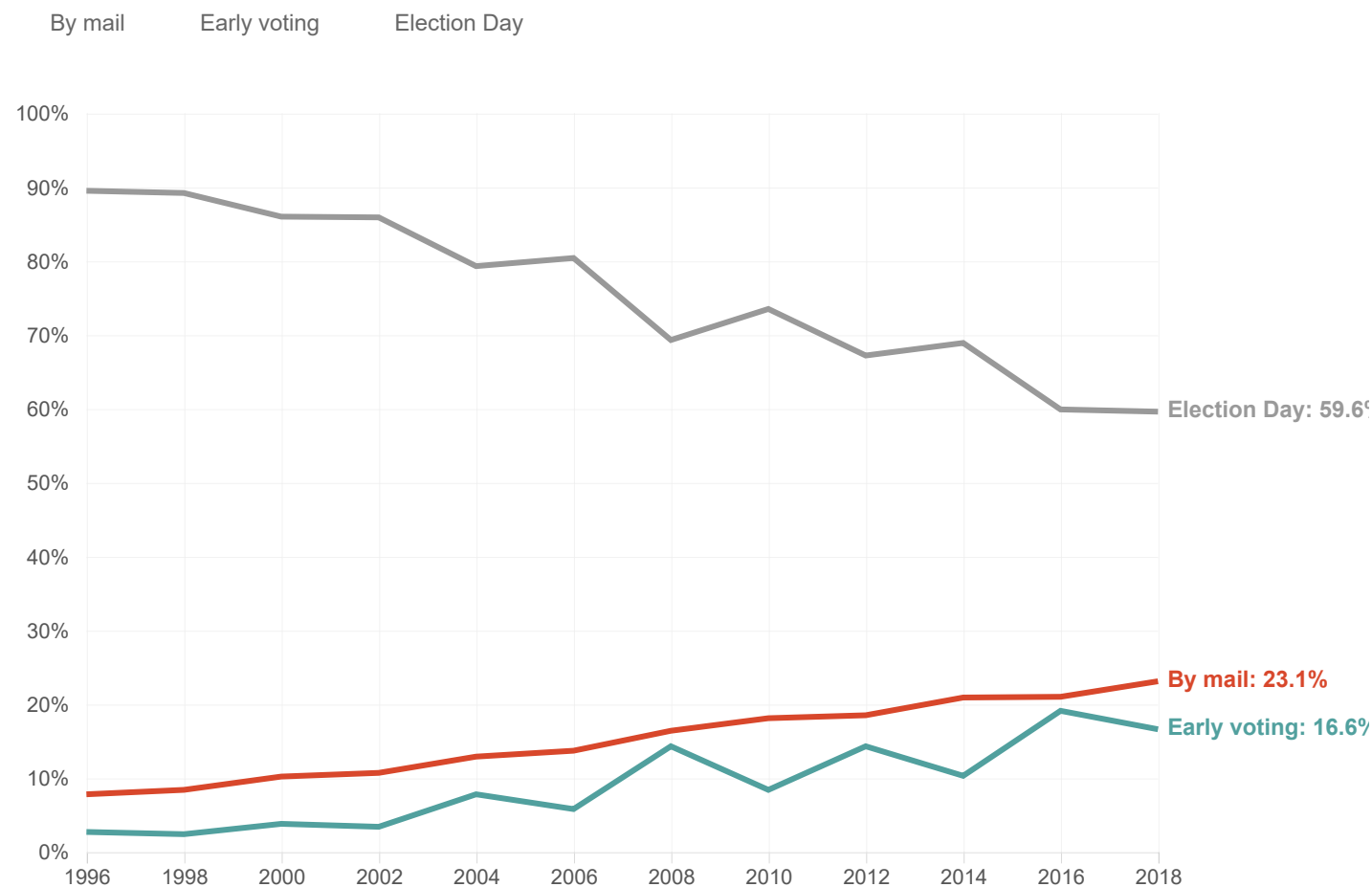
It's a theory that Attorney General William Barr floated this month in an interview with *The New York Times*, and it's one that election officials and experts have called "preposterous" and "false."

"Election officials spend a great deal of our time building in security measures," said Washington Secretary of State Kim Wyman, a Republican. "The idea that people could print millions of ballots either within the country or external to the country, just on its face, is not going to pass muster with an election official."

Safeguards in place

Nearly 1 In 4 Votes Was Cast By Mail In 2018

Although early voting tends to see a jump during presidential election years, voting by mail has seen a steady increase as a share of all voting in general elections since 1996.



Notes

In 2018, 0.7% of respondents didn't know or refused to say what method they had used for voting.

Source: *U.S. Census Bureau*

Credit: *Thomas Wilburn/NPR*

In all, Morrell listed dozens of unique aspects that the adversary would have to copy perfectly, in addition to lining up the ballot with an actual voter in a registration system and faking a signature that aligned with the signature on file for the voter.

"You would need to replicate all of these elements exactly and do it for the 10,000-plus jurisdictions and hundreds of thousands of unique ballot styles within the U.S.," she said.

The president's unsubstantiated claims of mail-voting fraud by foreign countries are only fueling those concerns.

"They're going to lose the election, and I think they're going to claim fraud," said New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, when asked about the claims by CNN.

Election officials, whose job it is not only to run the elections smoothly but to present the process with transparency and protect confidence, are also worried.

"The President is chipping away at voter confidence in our elections, which is a dangerous road to go down," tweeted Barb Byrum, the county clerk of Ingham County, Michigan.

Wyman, who is running for reelection this November in Washington, said Republicans in her state have begun reaching out to her campaign concerned about the potential for fraud that Trump is talking about.



2020 ELECTION: SECURE YOUR VOTE

Tom Ridge, Ex-DHS Secretary, Laments 'Sad' Trump Fears About Voting By Mail

Recent polls in Iowa and Florida show that Republicans in those states are more likely this year to vote in person, rather than by mail, and that Democrats are more likely to vote by mail — even though in the past, absentee voting has been more popular among Republicans.

Former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge, a Republican and also the nation's first secretary of homeland security, told NPR last week that Trump's unfounded claims could discourage Republicans from using a form of voting that is increasingly popular and potentially safer when considering the coronavirus pandemic.

Ridge co-chairs a new bipartisan group called VoteSafe that is advocating for a number of election changes, such as increasing the amount of mail voting, in response to the pandemic.

"I think it's very sad and very disappointing that with almost five months to go, the president seems to [want to] try to delegitimize the Nov. 3 election," said Ridge. "It just seems to me that this may be an indication he's more worried about the outcome than he's worried about fraud."

NPR's Pam Fessler contributed reporting to this story.

Clarification

June 22, 2020

An earlier version of this story mistakenly referred to Tom Ridge as the governor of Pennsylvania. He is a former governor.

mail voting

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<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/22/881598655/fact-check-trump-spreads-unfounded-claims-about-voting-by-mail>

Wyman even extended a personal invitation to Trump and Barr, to come to Washington state and inspect the county offices where mail ballots are inspected before they are counted.

"If the president really believes that there is this potential for vote rigging and fraud, the president needs to come to Washington and let me show him what we do here," Wyman said. "We can answer those questions directly and maybe even make him believe that this election is going to be fair."

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NPR via YouTube

Questions about motive

Democrats all the way up to presumptive presidential nominee Joe Biden have worried openly for months, if not years, about whether Trump was planting the seeds to be able to call the electoral process rigged or fraud ridden if he loses in November.



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